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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### EVERYDAY IDENTITY CHANGE

### Convergences and challenges, achievements and agendas of recent research

**Jennifer Todd**

*University College Dublin*

**ABSTRACT:** This article reviews some recent trends in research on everyday identity change. It argues that this field of research makes an important contribution to the explanation of political change and social transformation. It is particularly relevant to research on participation, social movements and contentious politics: like the latter, it emphasizes relationality, temporality and context, not simply variables and generalization; like the latter, it focusses on agency, choice and social practice as well as structure, power and constraint. Its focus on moving out from exclusivist, closed and oppositional forms of group identity is of particular interest. The article outlines some of the challenges and achievements of this field of research and highlights four areas where significant work exists and where it may usefully be developed further. In particular it focusses on: boundary work, and the informal nudging of boundaries towards greater permeability; identity-work, and the challenge of comparison; (once)-dominated and (once)-dominant groups, and their distinctive forms of identity change; and the interrelation of everyday, institutional and political processes. It argues for the need to incorporate analysis of everyday change in multi-levelled explanations of socio-political outcomes.

**KEYWORDS:** everyday identity change; relationality; boundary work; meaning making; dominant populations.

**CORRESPONDING AUTHORS:** Jennifer Todd, [Jennifer.todd@ucd.ie](mailto:Jennifer.todd@ucd.ie)

## 1. Introduction

This article reviews some recent trends in research on everyday identity change that focus on meaning-making and the challenge to group closure. While this has been a vibrant area of research, it has seldom been integrated into wider analyses of political contention and social transformation. It is particularly relevant to ongoing research on participation, social movements and contentious politics: like the latter, it emphasizes relationality, temporality and context, not simply variables and generalization; like the latter, it focusses on agency, choice and social practice as well as structure, power and constraint. The literature on everyday identity change is particularly important in three ways that I discuss in more detail below:

- in its focus not simply on identity change *towards* group polarization, but also and equally on moving *out from* exclusivist, closed and oppositional forms of group identity. As I outline below, there has been much research on the movement into exclusionary forms of groupness, and much less on the movement away from it. The literature on everyday identity and boundary change is one of the few exceptions. It adds an emphasis on meaning, agency and social dynamics to the existing psychological literature on prejudice reduction, contact and disengagement.
- in its emphasis not on ideological framing and categorization alone but on structures of perception, feeling and valuation rooted in social practice. Thus it synthesizes the constructivist emphasis on the social practice of identity-making with recognition of the situatedness and weight of identity in personal feeling, perception and habitus. As I argue below, this requires critical assessment of some contemporary paradigms of analysis.
- in its premise that identity processes are socially important in a disaggregated, conflictual way, such that identity politics is produced in a field of intersecting processes, conflicting forces and intense activity. Thus it points to the need to study the interrelation of organized identity politics (in parties, movements and campaigns) and the wider field of everyday identity processes.

The article does not attempt a full overview of the literature on identity change in all its dimensions.<sup>1</sup> It focusses on everyday identity change in the sense of meaning-making, relational change and subversion of power in situations of group division. This research goes beyond analyses of category shift and shifting classificatory schema, which are already an important part of the social science tool-kit.<sup>2</sup> Research into everyday meaning-making, however, is sometimes dismissed by those who analyze big political processes: it is said to be merely interpretative, non-representative, even anecdotal. In this article I explore some recent conceptual developments that address these challenges and facilitate comparative qualitative work. I focus in particular on studies of everyday movement away from closed and oppositional forms of group identity and solidarity, arguing that these everyday processes play a crucial role in political and social transformations. This article does not attempt to give definitive answers about the conditions under which everyday identity change occurs and becomes socially important. Rather it shows where ongoing research has brought us closer to answers.

The article begins by outlining some of the conceptual convergences and the challenges posed by research into everyday identity change. It goes on to show how this research opens new paths for understanding movement out of closed forms of group division. It highlights four fields which combine conceptual development and significant comparative work: boundary work, and the informal nudging of boundaries towards greater permeability; identity-work, and the challenge of comparison; the contrast between (once-)dominated and (once-)dominant groups in their forms of everyday identity change; the interrelation of everyday, institutional and political change. It argues for the need to incorporate analysis of everyday change in multi-levelled explanations of socio-political outcomes and concludes with suggestions where further research may be particularly valuable.

## **2. Conceptual convergences and challenges**

Research on social movements and contentious politics has foregrounded processes of identity change in the process of mobilization. Work by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) on contentious politics shows how collective identity and group opposition are formed through elite brokerage and ideological framing. Della Porta (2013) contextual-

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of the literature on identity change in sociology, see Owens, Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2010); in psychology, see Vignoles, Schwartz and Lucyckx (2011); in political science and international relations, see Rumelili and Todd (2018).

<sup>2</sup> See Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston and McDermott (2009); Chandra (2012).

izes social movement dynamics in light of state responses, showing how this generates polarizing and radicalizing processes. This is further developed in studies on radicalization and terrorism (Alimi, Demetriou and Bosi 2015). New studies of engagement and disengagement, contextualizing social movements in wider social fields, and showing the generational impact of contentious politics brings social movement research to bear on everyday actors, those who are not yet, or no longer, mobilized, but whose perspectives and perceptions have been shaped by mobilization (Bosi, Giugni and Uba 2016).

Thus social movement research begins to meet with another field of research on everyday identities, perceptions and perspectives, that focusses on micro-interactional, micro-organisational and intersubjective practices. Increasingly this scholarship has focussed on identity and boundary change and the practices and patterns of change carried on by everyday agents. This literature is largely empirical. Conceptually and theoretically, however, it lies in the tradition of the critical and cultural Marxists, in particular Pierre Bourdieu, in whose early work, like that of Marx himself, social practice is ontologically foundational, generating perceptions, dispositions of judgment, a habitus, prior to ideological framing (Bourdieu 1992, 78-86).<sup>3</sup>

This provides a distinctive approach to identity: at once structurally situated and practically made; at once convergent amongst those from similar social positions and personal; at once permeated by power-relations and individualized (Bourdieu 1992, 80-82). From this perspective there is no great ontological chasm between group identity and personal or individual identity: the individual is constituted by his/her social relations, rooted in social structure, and it is through their personalized, intuitive sense and responses that groups (at the level of social consciousness) are perceived and in part constituted. This stands at variance with those strands in social science which make a major ontological distinction between the collective and the individual.<sup>4</sup> It works from a practically-grounded notion of identity, in which there is no such primary and unbridgeable distinction.<sup>5</sup> In such an ontology of social practice, self-making and world-

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<sup>3</sup> In 1844 Marx noted that 'the forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present', and study of the perceptions and judgments that show the class-specific (and more recently ethnic- and gender-specific) form and potential of the 'senses' was taken up by a range of 'cultural' Marxists, from the first generation critical theorists to Raymond Williams to Pierre Bourdieu; it has influenced contemporary thinkers who are more critical of the tradition, from Brubaker to Benhabib and from Lamont to Jenkins.

<sup>4</sup> So, for example, social identity theorists insist on this ontological distinction, as do social scientists who follow this school (see Pehrson and Reicher (2014) for a very clear argument for this position).

<sup>5</sup> Hammersley and Treseder (2010) use the term 'reflexive self' to describe this tradition of thinking: others who explicitly work within it include Jenkins (2008) and Cohen (1996).

making are intrinsically interrelated, and 'private troubles' are intertwined with, and give insight into, 'public issues' (Brewer 2003). This research tradition has parallels in the social movement literature: Melucci (1996) disaggregates identity and its negotiation within social movements themselves, such that negotiation among and between different levels of the movement (down to the most micro) constitute the collectivity.

Within this tradition of research, identity is related to intersubjective practices and interdependencies, with related structures of feeling and perception, rather than primarily to imposed ideological frames. The grounding of identity in social practices, perceptions and feelings shows that identity change is more than category change: it also involves practical change in dispositions and intuitions, in social investments and emotional attachments (Todd 2005). It is not simply change in formal institutional rules, but also – and in an ontological sense primarily – change in convergent social judgments and valuations.<sup>6</sup> This makes the interaction between formal legal changes, institutional structures, organized political movements to support or change them, and everyday identity processes a prime topic for research.

Research on everyday identity change is also important in providing a balance to the dominant trend of current research, which focusses on the movement into exclusionary and solidaristic groupness. 'Groupness', a term coined by Brubaker (2002) and developed by Lamont, Moraes Silva, Welburn, Guetzkow, Mizrahi, Herzog and Reis (2016a), is a continuum concept that indicates the extent to which defined populations have permeable or closed boundaries, inclusionary or exclusionary norms, and more or less solidarity among and sensed opposition by group members. Nationally or ethnically defined populations can move to tighter or to more permeable forms of groupness, without changing group identification. Much contemporary literature in sociology and political science focusses on the movement into oppositional groupness. But, in everyday life, the movement out from closed, oppositional groupness is as common as the movement into it, and the tendencies to balk at group constraints as strong as the tendencies to seek them. As I argue below, an emphasis on the everyday remaking of meanings allows us to grasp the tendencies away from, as well as towards, group opposition.

Research on everyday change is also important substantively, in explaining the varying impacts that such change may have. There are cases where everyday boundary-

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<sup>6</sup> Temporally, of course, change in institutions and laws often precedes informal practical change: but it does not guarantee it, and where informal change in practices and expectations does not follow, institutions and laws function quite differently than might be anticipated (see the extensive literature on institutional change and its reliance on the anticipations and coordination practices, assumptions and values of those within the institutions, for example Mahoney and Thelen 2009)

work is collective, convergent and has major social impact, as Bayat (2010) has discussed in his analysis of the 'bad hijab' in Iran, where women gradually – and often at high personal cost – nudged the social rules towards greater flexibility by showing infinitesimally-increasing amounts of hair. There are cases where it has no social impact. If Bayat gives examples at one end of the spectrum of impactful everyday change, Scott (1985) gives an example at the other: his analysis of peasant resistance shows everyday remaking of meaning, countering the dominant categories and values of globalization, but in a social context where the processes of globalization proceed unchanged by this activity, at best partially and very temporarily humanized. There are also many cases in between: where widespread identity change begins and is cut short by violence or later reversed in response to social power; and where everyday identity change does not itself change social divisions or the power-centres that uphold them, but provides a social basis for mobilization that does. In the latter case, everyday identity change generates structures of perception and feeling that permit some political discourses to resonate with the population (in Schudson's (1989) sense), and others to fail to do so. It provides popular practical and moral support that can sustain mobilization over time despite state repression and social power. To explain when everyday change has impact, and how it can resonate with and sustain organized movements, requires us to understand the patterns of everyday change.

In all of these ways, the analysis of everyday identity change provides a distinctive perspective on social change, sometimes challenging and often challenged by those who read it from a paradigmatic perspective. It involves seeing change in the meanings of social division and group identity in the personal interstices of social life, accessing the understandings of individuals who do not proclaim them overtly, and finding ways to interrelate micro-qualitative research with macro-processes of change. It does not neglect the social structural foundations of micro-change but it does give micro-agency a level of autonomy.

### **3. Groupness and everyday identity processes**

There is now considerable research on how movement towards the oppositional and closed forms of groupness becomes institutionally and psychologically entrenched. Psychological tendencies towards group solidarity and closure (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and cognitive tendencies to reduce uncertainty (Hale 2008) underpin the group understandings generated in networks and the group interests generated by horizontal inequality (Rydgren 2006; Stewart 2008; Wimmer 2013). Political framing, brokerage, and

the opening of opportunity give individuals incentives to opt for a group identification, with all the linkages and alliances it brings (Brubaker, 2002; Laitin, 2007; McAdam *et al.* 2001). The feedback patterns between structural (horizontal) inequality and cultural division are now well attested (Stewart 2008, 2014; Lamont *et al.* 2016a; Buhaug, Cederman and Gleditsch 2014). Analysis of conflict processes has increasingly integrated psychological mechanisms (the need for self-esteem and self-justification) with institutional analysis of the norms and assumptions embedded in dominant institutional practices. Where violent conflict is protracted, there is mutual reinforcement of institutional structures and entrenched and hardened identities in what Bar-Tal (2013) calls an 'ethos of conflict': daily practices in group-specific institutions reproduce the values and assumptions that let ordinary people keep a sense of self-esteem and pride, while retaining group solidarity and reducing anxiety in the midst of violent conflict. Thus, exclusion, network formation, and horizontal inequality create strong feedback patterns between micro-processes of group identity formation, institutional structures and state policies (Bar-Tal 2013; Wimmer 2013; Ruane and Todd 2004; Koinova 2013). In social movements and conflict processes, these mechanisms take place in accelerated form: harsh state reaction radicalizes participants in social movements (della Porta 2013), while different contexts and timings of mobilization lead to different trajectories and outcomes for participants (della Porta, Fernández, Kouki and Mosca 2017; Hoewer 2014).

There has been much less emphasis on the reverse movement away from exclusionary and oppositional groupness. There are important studies of everyday micro-processes that diverge from tight forms of groupness (Brubaker, Fleishschmidt, Fox and Grancea 2006; Trošt and Mandić 2018; Hromadžić 2015), but they are not linked to wider theories of foundational human capacities, or to scholarship on psychological mechanisms, networks, meso-institutions, or state forms. As a result, the positive feedback patterns that can sustain such processes have not been explored. There are psychological studies, most importantly the 'contact hypothesis' pioneered by Allport (1954) and developed in many works (recently, Hewstone *et al.* 2014), although this has been criticized for taking too individualized a perspective, with too little emphasis on relationality and social context (see Dixon and Levine 2012).

The dominant paradigms of analysis of identity change take identity change as a matter of category and role rather than relationality and meaning, and thus unnecessarily limit research on the movement out of groupness. Social Identity Theory (SIT) has been called the single most important psychological theory in the wider social sciences (Brown 2000), and it has been widely used in political science and international rela-

tions.<sup>7</sup> It conceives of a multiplicity of 'identities' within the self (Tajfel and Turner 1979), radically distinguishes collective and personal identities (Pehrson and Reicher 2014), and focuses on collective action (Stott, Drury and Reicher 2012). It describes the psychological and discursive mechanisms that lead to intra-group solidarity and inter-group opposition (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Skey 2011). This conception of the self as a locus of cognitive mapping of multiple identities leaves little room for individual agency and meaning-making (cf Huddy 2001). From this perspective, situational shifts in identity categorization are common (Amiot, De la Sablonniere, Terry and Smith 2007), but lasting identity change beyond oppositional group identities requires either a supraordinate identity (for example, integration into common citizenship or cosmopolitan values), or else complete exit. Work within this tradition on disidentification, dissatisfaction, dissimilarity and detachment (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001; Becker and Tausch 2015) is highly relevant to understanding identity change away from groupness, including exit from social movements: but it does not encompass the remaking of meanings, for example the ways some people remain Croat or Macedonian, but in a different, more open way.

This failure to explore the whole range of meaning-mechanisms away from groupness has major analytic consequences. Within the very extensive scholarship on power-sharing institutions of governance, for example, there has been relatively little analysis of the identity processes involved (but see Jarrett 2018; Raffoul 2018; Larin and Roggla 2019). Where attention is given to identity change, this is often understood in terms of category change and changing political choices. But this is too high a threshold of change: if we want to explore the dynamics of group identity processes, the constant triggers for rethinking, and the grave difficulties of sustaining change, we need also to look at the changing everyday meanings of group identification. Within the study of social movements, equally, there has been relatively little theoretical or comparative analysis of the mechanisms of inclusivity in contentious contexts (but see Smithey 2013). Social movements themselves struggle with the challenge of inclusivity in a context of polarized media and politics. For theory to guide practice requires more analysis of the mechanisms leading away from group polarization.

Recent constructivist theories of ethnic identity change (Chandra 2012; Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston and McDermott 2009) provide an essential starting point for analysis of the mechanisms of change away from closed and oppositional groupness, combining detailed micro-identity analysis with wider social analysis. Chandra (2012) gives an ele-

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<sup>7</sup> For brevity, I do not consider here the 'role' orientation associated with Stryker (2000) and developed by Burke and Stets (2009), although it too does not highlight the changing meanings and redefinitions of roles.



gant analysis of ethnic identity change which captures much of the richness and diversity of social understandings in a simple schema. She provides a clear identity matrix based on the conventional rules used in a given society. These rules define (i) the range of identity categories in a given field, for example the range of possible ethnic categories (Croat, Serb, Bosniak); (ii) the possible interrelations of categories (for example are Croat, Serb and Bosniak exclusive categories or can one be all at once?); (iii) the 'attributes', ie the range of qualities or properties that support claims to belong to the group (for example, race, language, parents' ethnicity, preferred associative practices etc); (iv) for each class of attribute, the range of possible categories and the possible interrelations between them (for race in some societies a sharp black/white dyad, in others a spectrum of racial terms distinct from a spectrum of colour terms, see Roth 2012); (v) the interrelation between identity categories in different fields (religion, nationality, ethnicity, class), which may or may not be homologous. Each individual, with her own set of attributes, therefore has a range of available ethnic category choices.

This model of ethnic identity change depends on a notion of rules as conventionally given. Change in the rules is then a process involving brokerage and new alliance building, outside the bounds of individual choice and change. This highlights strategic and instrumental individual processes of reclassification. It leaves unanalyzed the process of meaning-making, defining it as non-constitutive of ethnicity. But the basic strategy can in principle be adapted to encompass meanings (ie the subset of wider assumptions, narratives and value-claims associated with ethnicity that in any given society are appealed to in contest over it). Indeed it should so be adapted. The seeming 'naturalness' of the rules of (ethnic) membership lies in their coherence with the meanings and values assigned to membership.<sup>8</sup> In those many cases where ethnic divisions are defined by informal rules of interaction, rather than formal legal classifications, then meaning and reference are interwoven: who belongs in the group depends on how groupness is understood and what values are held to underlie the contested membership rules, and as meanings change so too do assessments of group membership (for a Bosnian example, see Hromadžić 2015). Nationalisms are excellent examples of contested projects where contest over the meaning and value of the national tradition and projects is endemic (Hutchinson 2005) and is intrinsically related to everyday judgments on the boundaries of the nation and who is or can become a member.

To acknowledge that meaning-change is an important part of the movement away from closed and oppositional groupness opens up the research agenda. It raises ques-

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<sup>8</sup> What Barth (1969, 14) called the 'basic value orientations: the standards of morality and excellence by which performance is judged'.

tions of when and how everyday agency helps change the (informal) rules governing group identity. It invites synthetic analysis of the existing rich empirical material on everyday identity changes to trace if and when they have wider impact on group boundaries and political processes.

#### **4. Everyday identity change and the movement out of (closed) groupness**

This section focusses on four fields where conceptual advances have stimulated empirical research that reveals an unexpected range of repertoires and outcomes of identity change. The studies discussed here situate micro-agency in wider structural, institutional and organizational processes and focus on moves out from closed groupness. Out of the very wide range of case studies, I have chosen several Irish case studies to illustrate the points, since the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland present a natural experiment for the study of identity change. My general point, however, is that comparison across cases is necessary.

##### **4.1 Boundary work: nudging ethnic and national boundaries**

Over the last 20 years, analysis of boundary work, boundary properties, and modes of boundary change have formed a major area of sociological study (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Wimmer 2013 ). This encompasses the study of processes of formal classification, like citizenship law (for its role in the case of Hungarians in Transylvania, see Kiss *et al.* 2018). There is also considerable literature on the nudging of (informal) symbolic boundaries towards greater openness and permeability. As Brubaker (2015) has argued, some important distinctions are primarily informal: in contemporary divided societies, once overt legal discrimination has ended, informal distinctions are particularly important, as, equally, are the social practices which constitute them.

The nudging of the informal rules of distinction towards greater openness is often a matter of micro-practice, whose effects may be highly localized. Smithey (2011) has shown how practical change in the forms of ritual celebration within local loyalist neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland can lead to very significant change in understandings of social relations and politics. Claeson (2017), in a study of local reconciliation practices in Derry-Londonderry showed how seemingly small changes in practice – the opening up of local discussion forums on marching - led to further practical changes with the knock-on effect of ameliorating local group opposition and facilitating inter-

group discussion.<sup>9</sup> Of course in these cases organizations were also involved: in the Derry case, local marching bands (usually each with only a small number of members and informally organized), and also, indirectly, international funding agencies, government sponsored organizations (the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council), and local individuals who were also members of churches, political parties and large religio-political organizations. But the main activity – the negotiation and subsequent change in social practice and the (local) norms of acceptability – was grass roots and local, rather than involving representatives of large organizations. Such everyday practices are important in an exemplary way, to show how boundary change takes place in and through processes of changing individual practices, assumptions and identities. However wider social impact may be minimal: the changes traced by Smithey (2011) among some loyalist activists are by no means typical in Northern Ireland (see the contrasting trajectories reported by Shirlow, Tonge and McAuley 2012).

There are, however, a set of cases where everyday changes have intersected with, and driven further, trajectories of political and institutional change. Small nationalizing states often provide opportunities for just such incremental and generationally accelerating change in national identity. Such small states – for example the Republic of Ireland, Albania, Finland, Denmark – have constantly to adapt national sovereignty (and related concepts of national identity) to geopolitical imperatives while at the same time continuously asserting national identity.<sup>10</sup> These political changes are elite led, and structurally underpinned, but the wider population participates in them, beginning an everyday dynamic that may take on a trajectory that would not have been anticipated simply by looking at the structural beginnings, or the elite discourse. Jenkins (2012) works from participant observation to describe an ongoing trajectory in Denmark where everyday awareness of the increasingly difficult fit of the notions of ‘being Danish’ with everyday educational and social experience was – by the 2010s – beginning to produce political change.

A different trajectory can be seen in the Republic of Ireland, where the structural opening of Irish economy in the late 1950s had a wider cultural and national impact (Brown 2004). Elite discourse moved – albeit very slowly – away from ethnic or religious forms of national identity, and with much discussion based on survey material and elite discourse on whether the notion of nation is now culturally-, historically-, or

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<sup>9</sup> See also ongoing practice funded by the Community Relations Council: <https://www.community-relations.org.uk/core-funded-groups/londonderry-bands-forum>, accessed January 14 2018.

<sup>10</sup> On nationalizing states, see Brubaker 1996. On Ireland, see Ruane 2010; on Albania and Ireland parallels, see Gjoni nd; on Finland see Fagerlund and Sampo 2013; Alapuro 2015; on Denmark, see Jenkins 2012. Similar processes exist in some autonomous regions, see Keating 2001.

state-defined (for overviews see Coakley 2009; O Dochartaigh 2012; Cleary 2002 ). Everyday views however changed in a rather different way than would have been expected. In analyzing everyday discourses about the nation generated in open-ended interviews with 145 respondents in the Republic of Ireland in the early 2000s, Todd (2015) found not primarily the expected ethnic or liberal notions of nationality but rather a ‘variable geometry’ concept of nationality, such that a set of attributes is deemed relevant to membership of the nation, but no subset is seen as either necessary or sufficient for membership. Membership, therefore, is negotiable and claims are made and negotiated on the basis of the national tradition and the national project. In such circumstances, convergent individual nudges of meaning towards more flexibility take place, and incrementally change the rules; as new rules become common in everyday practice they change the criteria of national belonging and provide a popular cultural basis for later collective decisions and official affirmation of change.

Such everyday changes do not immediately affect political choices. This process co-existed with a tightening of Irish citizenship regulations – affirmed in referendum in 2004 - which weakened the Irish tradition of *jus soli* (Honohan 2007).<sup>11</sup> The variable geometry repertoires however explain why, when the law has been applied to deport young people who were born or grew up in the country, it has provoked vocal public outrage in the local areas that has, in the most recent case, led the government to reverse its decision.<sup>12</sup> Here everyday changes in understanding of nationality have radically impacted local practices and protests, and thereby political action. Notably they did not affect the earlier voting pattern.

When then does the everyday nudging of boundaries towards greater permeability and of identities towards greater openness have wider impact on social relations and political decisions? What is countenanced and what repressed depends of course on power and interest. But it depends too on the character of social power, political accountability, and the relations between those who police and those who change the

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<sup>11</sup> The referendum itself was presented as a pragmatic change that would ‘close a loophole in the citizenship laws and so prevent potential abuses’ (*Irish Times*, Jun 12, 2004 <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/citizenship-referendum-carried-by-massive-majority-1.982003>). It did not create a new legal framework: one expert has recently written that there remains an ‘absence of a comprehensive legal framework on immigration in Irish primary law’ (Mannion 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Recent protests have led to reexamination of the state’s judgment and a review of the law, but not – at time of writing (January 2019) an actual change in it. *Irish Independent*, 10 November, 2018 <https://www.independent.ie/regionals/braypeople/news/erics-case-is-to-be-reexamined-by-government-37499231.html>

social rules. It is a matter of meaning as well as power: the exemplary cases of everyday change highlight the liminality (as well as the arbitrariness) of the rules, and the absurdity (as well as the cruelty) of too rigid an adherence to them. Small nationalizing states sometimes experience an ongoing momentum, where state-led change and everyday change interact to support one another and where – in contrast to the hardening of identities and closure of boundaries in many contemporary majority nationalisms – everyday members of majority populations participate in and sometimes drive the process of opening boundaries and blurring distinctions. When this occurs, within what limits, and what relations between institutional structure, class relations and political culture help or hinder it, are worthy questions for further systematic comparison.

#### ***4.2 Identity work: meaning, comparison and causality***

Identity work is active work on one's own dispositions, capacities and attributes, working on the self in order to increase one's resources to act effectively (Todd 2005). Sometimes it is undertaken for the sake of, and in the process of, social and political change; sometimes in order to fit into an existing social structure; in some cases, change for strategic purposes – for example of avoiding discrimination – may also nudge social relations towards greater permeability (Bursell 2012).

Working on the self in order to create resources for further social change is common in divided societies. It was typical of the life-trajectories of the female human shields in Israel that Sion (2014) analyzed. It is one of the types of change in racial boundaries in the USA found by Fleming, Lamont and Welburn (2012). It is common amongst religious evangelicals in Northern Ireland, who use repertoires of religious self-change in taking forward also political and social change (Mitchell and Ganiel 2011). Identity work was very common amongst mixed marriage respondents in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and France (Todd 2018, 147-174). It is a recognized repertoire in situations of conflict and conflict resolution: the interrelation of 'private troubles' and 'public issues' means that change at the private level can also be exemplary at the public (Brewer 2003). And it is a repertoire described in feminist social science studies: women thrust into political protest find that they change themselves in the process of political mobilization (Hoewer 2014) and indeed so too do some men (Riley 2017). Feminist international relations deals with very similar forms of boundary-blurring, meaning-making, self-questioning and institutional constraints, for example within the military, as do comparativists concerned with boundary and identity change (Partis Jennings 2017; Thomson 2018). Identity work takes place too within smaller-scale power-laden environments at work and in social life (Ecklund 2005; Ecklund, Park and

Veliz 2008). No overall synthetic comparison has yet been undertaken to assess the extent of similarity of mechanisms and repertoires across the different types of case.

There are, however, major difficulties in comparing qualitative studies of identity work. There is the question of interpretative frames – what are the relevant categories of comparison across very different cases? There is the question of thresholds of change – how much self-work counts as socially significant? And there is the question of frequency and typicality – are the cases of identity change more than anecdotal, what is their wider resonance and significance? If the ‘exemplary’ cases of self-work are notable for their clarity, how frequent are they?

The focus on identity work may usefully be complemented by a more synchronic analysis of identity change (or ‘identity innovation’) measured against a social rather than an individual starting point: a set of socially important divisions and distinctions in the society, relative to which change may occur. Identity innovation involves distantiation from these conventional codes and practices, and measures have been devised for different degrees of change.<sup>13</sup> Of course identity innovation may occur and fail to be sustained over time or spread. The concept allows us to look at the beginnings of change, which may later be stalled or reversed, and permits analysis of the proximate causes of identity change, the obstacles that it meets in different social circumstances, and the extent to which these vary with the type of change. Key research goals are to find out how frequent such identity innovation is comparatively and over time, in what circumstances it is sustained and spread, and how this varies with social situation and with type of change.

Using a robust measure that distinguished minor from significant and major identity innovation, Todd (2018, 97-122) found that among 220 respondents in 2003-6, a full two-thirds of those in still conflict-ridden Northern Ireland, and one third in the Irish Republic, undertook significant or major change. Most of those who changed in the Republic and about half of those who changed in Northern Ireland did so as a response to new opportunities, beginning with small, often strategic, change and later finding their practice producing new ways of thinking about social identity and social relations. Half of those who changed in the North, and only a handful in the South, did so as a form of identity work, typically provoked by perceived dissonance between their own moral intuitions and their own or their group’s actions and principles. It is significant –

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Ferree (2003) distinguishes resonant and radical (discursive) change. Bonikowski (2017), working with survey data, shows a limited range of ways of constructing nationality and shows how they vary over time in particular cases: and this measure can be used to assess how far popular views diverge from politically dominant constructs. Todd (2018) distinguishes minor, significant and major identity innovation.

and goes against common wisdom - that the extent and the radicalness of such identity change was much greater in the more divided, more oppositional, more exclusionary Northern Ireland than in the Republic of Ireland. Of course individual identity change is not correlated with change in social division. Ten years after the initial study, change had been marginalized in small clusters, local communities and family circles in Northern Ireland, politics had become significantly more oppositional, and micro-repertoires of 'pluralism' were now being used to oppose change. Meanwhile more gradual forms of change had accelerated and were generalized in the South.

This raises questions of very general comparative significance. First, what are the triggers of identity innovation? When is it a strategic response to opportunity? When is it a normatively informed response to dissonant experience? When is it simply a by-product of changing social practice? Second, what are the mechanisms by which such initial identity change is reversed? Violence is one obvious and well-attested mechanism, boundary-policing another. There are also socio-cultural mechanisms: traps of change occur when people choose directions of change that are particularly difficult to sustain with their given resources. Third, under what conditions are initial steps of identity change sustained and spread? To answer these questions requires further comparative exploration of the processes of identity change. It requires too an exploration of the relations – over time – between structural, everyday and social movement change (see section 4.4 below).

#### ***4.3 Everyday identity change amongst the (once-)dominated and the (once-)dominant***

A recent major comparative study has shown the symbolic resources used in everyday struggles against inequality, discrimination and 'assaults on worth' in the USA, Brazil and Israel (Lamont *et al.* 2016a). The study shows unorganized individuals across a range of societies and from different standpoints intuitively responding to assaults on worth by affirmation of solidarity and group values. They find that respect, recognition and dignity as group members are crucial to their agency and resilience (see also Lamont, Welburn and Fleming 2016b). However, different types of social and symbolic boundaries and socio-cultural resources lead to different choices: whether to affirm group identity within overarching shared social values and assumptions, whether to appeal to or to refuse permeable boundaries.

This study shows how solidarity and group identity take very different forms, depending how group boundaries are constructed socially, symbolically, and in relation to the political values promulgated by the state. These provide different cultural re-

sources that the once-dominated can use, and different opportunities of using these effectively. In a range of work, Lamont and her colleagues show the very clear differences in the repertoires used by dominated populations across societies, across class and occupational subgroups within them, and over time (for example, Lamont *et al.* 2016a; Welburn and Pittmann 2012; Lamont *et al.* 2012).

Studies of identity change within social movements adds another dimension. Hoewer's (2014) comparative study of women in anti-state movements in Chiapas and Northern Ireland shows the different ethnically-weighted repertoires adopted depending on the organization of the movement and the time of entry: if some movement organization allows a convergence of those whose different backgrounds and experiences prompt them to join at different times, in other cases changing organizational forms intensify these prior divisions. Riley's (2017) study of gender identity in Nepal during and after Marxist mobilization shows the different outcomes of similar repertoires and values in different circumstances. Both studies give insight into how the once-dominated respond to reform and demobilization, a key question for understanding the processes and problems of boundary renegotiation when group assertion is no longer politically necessary.

There is much less comparative research on how once-dominant populations respond to political reform and equalization. Identity change for majority populations often takes place through small incremental changes in symbolic boundaries (see section 4.1 above). But what happens when there is imposed change in the state itself to ensure greater equality for minorities or for the once-dominated? Does it vary with the depth of history of domination, and/or with the dominant understandings of nationalism, and/or with the sense of ontological insecurity linked perhaps to state-centred identities in times of change? Among whom, when, with what patterns and within what limits does identity change occur?

A landmark study by Hochschild (2016) in Louisiana shows how poorer whites responded to increasing political, social and economic setbacks by reaffirming a 'deep story' of the American dream which had been disrupted by affirmative action and 'unfair' favouring of minorities. While there are a few dissenters, they are less common, and sometimes work within the same broad narrative frame as those who move to a more closed sense of groupness. A parallel sense of class-related disruption and resentment, although framed by different repertoires, has been found in a study of national identity in the United Kingdom (Mann and Fenton 2016).

A rather different pattern is to be seen in divided and conflictual societies, where some degree of reform is recognized as the price of peace. Despite different structural circumstances, there are similar divisions between those who are intermittently open



to compromise and change but easily rebuffed back into a reactive and oppositional stance, on the one hand, and hard-liners, on the other hand, among unionists in Northern Ireland, ethnic Macedonians in the Republic of North Macedonia, and Israelis. The relative balance varies over time and between cases, but what is of interest is the pattern: when choice points occur, a significant cluster – typically around a half - votes for compromise, of whom many are later swayed back to opposition.<sup>14</sup>

There is very little comparative research on the cultural logics and repertoires of change within once-dominant populations.<sup>15</sup> It is, however, clear that normative repertoires are used in very different ways by different clusters of the population. Pluralist and multi-culturalist principles allow the once-dominated to assert their identity and to claim equality while requiring them to recognize and respect the identity of other. To once-dominant populations, whose identity was entwined with their privileged access to the state, reform of state structures necessarily disrupts identity and requires identity change. In this context, pluralist and multi-culturalist principles appear hypocritical: if all identities are to be recognized and respected, why do theirs first have to change? Studies by Lawther (2014) and McAuley (2016) on Northern Ireland, by Koinova (2013) and Neofotistos (2012) on Macedonia, and by Abulof (2014) on Israel suggest that in each case, identity is so tied up with the historic state that identity change has to take a different form and appeal to different values than it does with once-dominated groups.

Comparative analysis of how and when once-dominant populations – and what sections of them - successfully negotiate change is necessary to complement the studies of everyday incremental change, intentional self-work, and the struggles of dominated groups. Study of dominant groups can provide a key piece of the puzzle, showing one of the reasons why these other forms of boundary and identity change are so often stalled or reversed.

#### ***4.4 Interrelated strands and entwined processes***

When does micro-level change in identities and boundaries feed into wider social change? Individual and micro-identity change is often side-lined socially, even when it

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<sup>14</sup> In Israel, the important choice point was Oslo in 1993; since then those in favour of compromise have been marginalized; in Northern Ireland there was a sequence of choice points from 1969 through 1973 to 1998, in each of which about half of unionists voted for compromise, many of whom later reversed their position; in Macedonia, the important choice points for ethnic Macedonians lay in elections (whether or not to vote for the more ethno-nationalist party, VMRO-DPMNE) where there was recurrent swaying, and the 2018 referendum on the 'name' issue.

<sup>15</sup> But see Loizides 2015, which provides much evidence and narrative analysis of the arguments and organization of majority nationalists in Greece and the Western Balkans, including (North) Macedonia.

is widespread. But macro-level change in institutions and laws – as is abundantly clear in many post-conflict societies - does not of itself bring enough change in everyday culture to allow for transformation of social relations. Nor are social movements the sole bearers of change: they depend for their continued existence and impact on contextual factors, including everyday processes that sustain and strengthen them. The task is to show the interrelation of different strands and the entwining of different processes of change.

I have argued that everyday identity change is one of those processes with its own relatively autonomous dynamic. It is relevant to the reception of political ideologies and to the functioning of political institutions. It is only when political ideas ‘resonate’ with their audience – when ‘culture connects with interests that are themselves constituted in a cultural frame’ (Schudson 1989, 169) - that political appeals meet a public response, social movements are strengthened and everyday change accelerates. Those processes of everyday change, in turn, are made possible by the new resources and opportunities brought by structural changes. Tracing the interrelations of structural changes, social movements, and micro-level processes of change is a necessary part of what Wimmer (2013) has called a multi-levelled processual explanation of social change.

Hochschild’s (2016) study of ‘tea-party’ supporters does exactly this in the local-regional context of Louisiana, by showing how their falling social status and economic condition, the social problems, ecological and economic crises that they face and their blocked political opportunities make this one of the few ways they can make sense of their predicament.

There are fewer recent examples of popular and public change away from group closure that allow a tracing of the interrelations of everyday, structural, institutional and movement change. One such case lies in the recent transformation of the national political culture in the Republic of Ireland, brought by the Marriage Equality referendum (2015) and the referendum to remove the constitutional ban on abortion (2018). While definitive studies have yet to be written, some of the activists and actors who were involved in the campaigns and debates have written in detail about their work.<sup>16</sup> Four things are clear. First, activists were important, and some had been working on the issues for three decades. But only small numbers were constantly active; the rebirth of activism and its generalization is itself to be explained. Second, the generational effect. What happened in the 2010s was the mobilization on these issues of a new generation who already had different values than their elders (Elkink *et al.* 2016). Third the power

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<sup>16</sup> More is written on the marriage equality referendum than on the more recent abortion referendum. See for example Healy, Sheehan and Whelan 2016; Elkink, Farrell, Reidy and Suiter 2016.

configuration – the decline of the Catholic church, the new party political imperatives of regaining public trust after the economic bust – which gave openings and institutions (the Citizens Assembly) for public debate free of religious and political hegemony (Elkink *et al.* 2016). And fourth, the campaigns, which appealed across generational and ideological lines. Studies of the marriage equality campaign by those involved in it emphasise not mobilization per se but the use of everyday networks to draw in those uncertain how to vote and to convince them of the need for legal change not on grounds of moral principle but of experience and empathy (Healy *et al.* 2016).

In this complex mix of structure, institutions, mobilization and politics, everyday identity change is one important element in producing the result. The everyday process can be summarized as follows. There was a generational logic of everyday identity change that began with a questioning of traditional nationalist irredentism and Catholic nationalism among young adults in the late 1950s in response to structural economic change; this was generalized to a questioning of the role of religion by their children, and was opened up more radically again in the third generation. This generational questioning formed an everyday cultural background of familial discussion and debate, that influenced also the views of the older generation, and that underpinned continued linkages and empathy across generational and ideological divisions. This in turn formed the social resource for networking, deliberation and convincing of the more conservative of the need for change on grounds of equality and empathy. The process illustrates the interrelation of slow structural processes and institutional trajectories (including the decline of the Catholic church), intermittent mobilization that in the 2010s benefitted from the changed power-configuration, and an everyday/familial dynamic of identity change that created a public with whom the campaign arguments resonated, and campaigners who recognized what arguments would resonate with the public.

## 5. Conclusion

Processes of everyday identity change are one important strand of change in social divisions and group boundaries, to be integrated into multi-levelled processual explanations of social transformation. I have emphasised four insights from the literature:

- The nudging of informal understandings of group boundaries towards more permeable forms. To look simply at formal legal definitions of groupness, even in the case of national belonging and citizenship, is to narrow the field of vision and to

ignore the changes of understanding, anticipation and everyday coordination practices that underlie protest against laws that breach everyday norms.

- The common mechanisms of identity and boundary change across diverse fields, and the commonalities as well as contrasts between identity change within social movements and in everyday interactions.
- The contrasting repertoires and norms of identity and boundary change appealed to by the once-dominated and by the once-dominant.
- The interrelations of everyday identity change and social movement onset, resonance, strength, and longer term impact, and the need to integrate analysis of everyday processes into explanations of political change and social transformation.

In particular, I have argued for the importance of comparative research on the ways different populations move out of narrow and closed forms of groupness. In a world where such groupness is increasing, knowledge of how it is countered in everyday practice is essential if political interventions to counter it are to be effective. The process of everyday identity change in (once-)dominant populations is a particularly important area for further research.

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#### Authors' information:

**Jennifer Todd** is a full professor at University College Dublin (until 2018 in School of Politics and International Relations, presently in the Geary Research Institute), Member of the Royal Irish Academy, Fellow of the Geary Institute, UCD, current Fellow of the Political Science Association of Ireland, and research director (previously director) Institute for British-Irish Studies, UCD. She writes on the structural and institutional conditions of (ethnic) conflict and the processes of institutional change that can lead to settlement, with particular expertise on Northern Ireland, and on issues of identity, ethnicity and identity change. She has published numerous singly and jointly authored and edited books and numerous book chapters and journal articles, including in *West European Politics, Political Studies, Parliamentary Affairs, Politics, Theory and Society, Archives Européennes de Sociologie, Nations and Nationalism*.